

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates.

January 2, 2003

Members of the Media Committee of the Green Party of the United States are deeply concerned that the FCC's impending biennial review of rules designed to protect the public from concentrated ownership of media outlets may result in steps that will severely weaken existing rules designed to protect the public's first amendment rights to diverse media.

Since the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, there has been a general trend toward greater concentration of ownership in private hands, justified by the notion that diversity may be defined simply in terms of numbers of outlets, and evaluated in increasingly narrow terms of commercial interests and private ownership. Far from increasing and expanding upon the marketplace of ideas and offering the public greater choice of outlets, the result has been to concentrate programming designed to support owners' financial interests, with fewer resources available for locally owned production and public access.

Given that the public holds ownership of the airwaves, the FCC was created and given a mandate to promote competition, diversity of ownership and access for local broadcasters. We are concerned that in the upcoming review (Docket No. 02-277), current guidelines concerning diversity and concentration of ownership will be defined in such a way as to limit the consideration of diversity to the criterium defined in the interests of commercial competition, and that the definition of locally-owned media may be expanded to include network-owned chain properties.

There currently exist more media outlets than ever before; however, studies demonstrate that media consolidation has had a negative effect on media diversity and local access to media outlets. True diversity of media is vital to the public interest in maintaining democracy and cannot rest solely on the whims of the marketplace. In the Supreme Court's opinion of 1945 (Associated Press vs. United States): "[The First Amendment rests on the assumption that the widest possible information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, ... [and] a condition for a free society... . Freedom to publish is guaranteed by the Constitution, but freedom to combine to keep others from publishing is not. Freedom of the press from governmental interference under the First amendment does not sanction repression of that freedom by private interests.

We urge the FCC to adhere to the guidelines expressed in the commission's original mandate, and to further strengthen such guidelines to effectively ensure public access to the media and true diversity of ownership.

Sincerely,

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